DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 264 FL 012 801

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TITLE Native Speaker-Nonnative Speaker Interaction among Academic Peers.
PUB DATE Dec 81
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (56th, New York, NY, December 27-30, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Discourse Analysis; Language Research; *Native Speakers; Non English Speaking; *Peer Relationship; Sociolinguistics; *Speech Communication; *Speech Habits; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Nonnative Speakers

ABSTRACT

The study investigates whether input and interaction features which previous research has identified as characteristic of native speaker (NS) - nonnative speaker (NNS) speech (features which occur more frequently in NS-NNS speech than in speech between NSs) will occur with equal frequency in NS-NNS speech settings in which the NNSs have considerable proficiency and enjoy peer status with the NS participants. Sixteen undergraduate students participated and were taped in NS-NNS dyads. The variables reported on are (1) present-nonpresent temporal marking of verbs, (2) ratio of topic-continuing to topic-nominating moves, (3) percentage of topic-nominating moves in question form, and (4) percentage of question types used in topic-nominations. The results confirm earlier claims of discourse features characteristic of NS-NNS interaction. These features, which reflect NS strategies designed to avoid conversational trouble, include the relatively great use of present-tense-oriented topics, of questions as a device for making topics salient, and of topics typically treated more briefly. Results also indicate that the frequency of discourse modifications by NSs in conversation with NNSs is variable and attributable to both the proficiency of the NNS participant and the shared knowledge that the subjects bring to the conversation. (Author/JK)

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Native speaker-nonnative speaker interaction among academic peers[1]

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In recent years, considerable attention has been given to the way native speakers (NSs) of a language address nonnative speakers (NNSs). Indeed, research of NS-NNS conversation has become a point of convergence of a number of language research interests.[2] Various claims have been made regarding the nature and significance of the characteristics of speech between NSs and NNSs, most important among these the notion that there exists an identfiable linguistic register which NSs consistently select for addressing less than fully proficient NNS participants.

Studies of how NSs address NNSs have been concerned, as Long 1980, 1981a points out, with two related but distinguishable phenomena: input and interaction. Early studies of NS-NNS speech were strongly influenced by the focus (and in some cases by the methodology) of Ferguson 1975: these studies investigated NS input--i.e., the linguistic forms (morphemes and utterances) directed at NNSs by NSs--with the primary goal of identifying those lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological features whose relative frequency or infrequency of use would serve to distinguish the speech NSs addressed to NNSs from speech between NSs. Later studies, including most of the investigations conducted during the past few years, have also examined NS-NNS interaction; greater attention has been given to describing utterances in terms of their function in conversation.

In the past six years, some three dozen data-based studies of input and interaction have been conducted. These studies have been conducted

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in a variety of settings and have used several methodological approaches. While there is considerable variability both within and across these studies, there is general agreement that the presence of a NNS verbal participant will cause a NS to make linguistic (input) and discourse (interaction) adjustments. It is also generally agreed that these adjustments are designed to reduce processing and conversational burdens on the NNS and to facilitate comprehension on the part of the NNS.

Some discourse modifications appear to reflect long-range strategies whose main purpose is to avoid conversational trouble. NS-NNS interaction is thought to be oriented to the 'here and now'; topics tend to involve content which is physically and/or temporally salient. Topics are treated briefly, and NSs appear relatively willing to relinquish topic control to their NNS interlocutor. When NSs nominate topics, the intent to shift topics is made prominent in a variety of ways: through 'left-dislocation' (Hatch 1978), through the relatively frequent use of conversational frames (e.g., O.K., So, Well, Now), and most of all through the use of questions. Long 1981b found that 96% of all topic-nominations in NS-NNS interaction were encoded as interrogatives.

Other interactional modifications appear to serve mainly to repair conversation when it breaks down. These disocurse tacts serve less to shape the nature of NS-NNS interaction as to enable it to be sustained. Prominent among the tactics frequently used by NSs as they interact with NNSs are requests for clarification, the use of repetition to confirm or to insure comprehension, and the willingness to accept unintentional topic-switches by the NNS. Many of the linguistic modifications characteristic of NS speech to NNSs are related to these discourse adjustments: e.g., the relatively high frequency of occurrence of interrogative sentences in NS-NNS

speech is a direct result of the perceived need to make topic nominations salient. Other input modifications, such as syntactic and lexical simplifications, may be geared toward the same purpose as, but independent of, discourse adjustments.

Several questions must be raised concerning the linguistic and discourse features identified to this point, however. Central among these is whether the features observed are characteristic of NS-NNS speech as a whole, or only certain kinds of NS-NNS conversation. Long 1980 suggests that input and interactional modifications are made with much greater frequency when speech between a NS and a NNS involves a genuine exchange of information. Long 1981c provides evidence of a different sort; there, the argument is made that input modifications constituting what by ordinary standards would be considered ungrammaticalities are more likely to occur in certain kinds of NS-NNS interaction than in others.[3] Furthermore, present claims about the nature of NS-NNS speech are based on data drawn from a relatively narrow range of settings. NNS subjects in most studies have been of limited proficiency; in most cases their NS counterparts have held, in addition to linguistic superiority, dominance in at least one other domain.

The study reported on in this paper explores the possibility that the characterization of NS-NNS speech may be too broadly conceived. In other words, it seeks to determine whether input and interaction features which previous research has identified as characteristic of NS-NNS speech (features which in some studies occurred significantly more frequently in NS-NNS speech than in speech between NSs) will occur with equal frequency in NS-NNS speech settings in which the NNSs have considerable proficiency and enjoy peer status with the NS participants. Specifically, the study replicates (with certain modifications) a previous investigation of NS-NNS speech, the Long 1981b study.

Design and procedures

A total of sixteen subjects (eleven NSs, five NNSs) provided the data for the present study. The subjects were all undergraduates enrolled in a course taught by the investigator. Participation by the subjects in the study was voluntary. Each subject was assigned to three dyads (two NSs participated in four dyads each). Each of the NSs participated in both NS-NS dyads and in NS-NNS dyads. Each of the five NNSs, all of whom were Malaysian females, participated in three NS-NNS dyads. There was a total of fifteen NS-NNS dyads and ten NS-NS dyads.

The subjects had been instructed in advance to orient their conversations around the course they had taken together: to discuss the course as a whole and/or any topic(s) which they had found especially interesting or uninteresting. The subjects were also told that the tapes would not be listened to until several weeks after the completion of the semester and that they could for that reason feel free to conduct their conversations as they wished. These instructions were designed to provide the subjects with a loosely-defined task that would enable them to assume considerable shared knowledge on the part of their co-participants; thus, the interactions would differ from those in previous studies of NS-NNS interaction (including Long 1981b), in which the participants knew very little or nothing about each other (and where there was certainly no shared experience comparable to having taken a course together for a full semester). On the other hand, the instructions left the subjects latitude to structure their conversations as they wished and, it was assumed, would allow for the observation of differences between NS-NS and NS-NNS interactional features, if indeed such would occur.

The taped conversations, which lasted from seven to fifteen minutes,

were transcribed by a research assistant and were checked by the investigator. Only the first six minutes (approximately) of each tape were used in assembling the corpora. For both the NS-NS corpus and the NS-NNS corpus, the analysis was conducted on a randomly selected sample of fifty topic-initiating moves, plus the topic-continuing moves elicited by them. The procedures used in identifying these moves were those described in Keenan and Schieffelin 1976, with two exceptions. First, the very first topic-initiating move in any conversation was excluded from consideration in the selection of the samples. Second, following Long 1981b, only topic-continuing moves contained in T-units (Hunt 1970)—i.e., in independent clauses with or without subordinate clauses and nonclausal structures—were counted.

In this preliminary report, only four of the several variables examined are reported on. For each of the dependent variables, performance by the subjects in the present study is compared to performance by the subjects in Long 1981b, which, as was already noted, involved NNSs with quite limited proficiency and NS-NNS dyads in which the participants were previously unacquainted. The variables reported on in the section below are as follows: (1) present/nonpresent temporal marking of verbs; (2) ratio of topic-continuing to topic-nominating moves; (3) percentage of topic-nominating moves in question form; and (4) percentage of question types used in topic-nominations.

Findings

(1) Present/nonpresent temporal marking of verbs. The comparative frequency of occurrence of verbs marked temporally for present and nonpresent was examined to test in rough form the claim that NS-NNS interaction is characteristically involved with topics in the 'here and now'—a feature

also associated with caretaker-child interaction (Cross 1977). In Long 1981b, the difference in temporal marking of verbs in NS-NS and NS-NNS interaction approached, but did not quite attain, statistical significance. In the present study, as in Long 1980 (in which the difference was significant at the .0005 level), the difference (significant at the .001 level) was greater than in Long 1981b. Collectively, these studies provide evidence that compared to speech between NSs, NS-NNS interaction is characteristically more oriented in the present (see Table 1 below).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

(2) Ratio of topic-continuing moves to topic-nominating moves. This ratio was computed for each sample to evaluate further the claim that topics in NS-NNS interaction tend to be treated briefly (Arthur et al. 1980). The present study provides less powerful support for this claim than did Long 1981b, in which the difference in the ratio in NS-NS and NS-NNS interaction was significant at the .0005 level; in the present study, the difference did not attain statistical significance, as shown in Table 2 below.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

(3) Percentage of topic-nominating moves in question form. As was the case in Long 1981b, topic-initiating moves were encoded most frequently as questions. Their use in nominating topics was greater in NS-NNS interaction than in interaction between NSs, although the almost exclusive use of questions for nominating topics found in Long 1981b was not found in the present study. Nevertheless, in the present study, as in Long 1981b, topic-nominations were encoded as questions significantly more frequently

in NS-NNS interaction than in NS-NS interaction (see Table 3 below).

It should be noted, however, that while virtually all fifty topics in the NS-NNS sample were nominated by NSs in Long 1981b, in the present study NNSs made 34% of the topic nominations. Thus, while the Long 1981b data suggests that the use of interrogatives to initiate topics is a characteristic strategy employed by NSs as they interact with NNSs (presumably for the purpose of making topic nominations salient), the data of the present study presents different evidence. Questions are used to nominate topics somewhat less frequently, and they are used for this purpose even more frequently by NNSs (12/17 or 71%) than by NSs (22/33 or 67%).

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

(4) Percentage of question types used in topic-nominations. The distribution of questions types in topic-nominating moves in the present study parallelled the Long 1981b findings, as can be see in Table 4 below. Indeed, the only difference was the preference, in the present study, for 'yes/no' questions over 'wh' questions in the NS-NNS data.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Discussion

The present study, a modified replication of Long 1981b, confirms earlier claims of discourse features which are characteristic of NS-NNS interaction. These features, which reflect NS strategies designed to avoid conversational trouble, include the relatively greater use (compared to NS-NS interaction) of present tense-oriented topics and of questions

as a device for making topics salient. In addition, topics are typically treated more briefly.

At the same time, however, the present study offers evidence that the frequency of use of discourse modifications by NSs in conversation with NNSs is variable. Based on the present study, such variation can be attributed to either of two sources, or perhaps to both. The first of these is the proficiency of the NNS participant. As mentioned above (p. 3), many studies of NS-NNS interaction have used NNS subjects with limited proficiency; in the present study, however, the NNSs were proficient enough in English that they could compete quite successfully with their NS peers in undergraduate coursework. Their proficiency in English, including their ability to handle the demands of verbal interaction (as demonstrated by the fact that NNSs initiated one-third of all topics in the NS-NNS sample), may explain why topics in the NS-NNS data were not treated as briefly as in the Long 1981b NS-NNS data. It may be that NS discourse modifications are made in accordance with the perceived proficiency of the NNS participant, much as input modifications are geared to the proficiency of the NNS (Gaies 1977). This hypothesis demands considerably more empirical confirmation, of course, although it is a logical extension of the observation that certain modifications of input and interaction are restricted in use to conversations with NNSs who have minimal proficiency in the language (Long 1981c). Furthermore, research which has focused on the ways in which learners provide feedback to their NS interlocutors (Gaies 1980, 1981) suggests that different learners exert different degrees of control over discourse. NNSs who give immediate evidence of the ability to share responsibility for structuring discourse (e.g., by nominating topics) may obviate the need for their NS co-participants to employ fully those strategies which are primarily aimed at sustaining conversation.

The second potential variable affecting the frequency of use of inter-

actional modifications by NSs is the shared knowledge which the subjects in the present study brought to their conversational tasks. In virtually all previous investigations of NS-NNS interaction, the members of conversational dyads were previously unacquainted (in quasi-experimental studies such as Arthur et al. 1980, the subjects were anonymous). In the present study, however, the subjects had taken an undergraduate course together for fifteen weeks; it is safe to assume that the subjects undertook their conversational tasks with a considerable body of shared knowledge. This factor, quite possibly in conjunction with the fact that the NNSs were highly proficient in English, might account for the smaller difference in the length of topic treatment in the NS-NNS and NS-NS data, as well as for the greater use of non-interrogative forms in NS-NNS topic-initiations.

This preliminary report of findings confirms the value of replication in applied linguistic research. The investigation of NS-NNS interaction has been intensively pursued in the last several years; nonetheless, the data base from which claims are made needs to be enlarged. Replication, with or without modification, has traditionally been considered an important part of the research enterprise; as the present study suggests, such research can both assess the validity of previous findings and provide clearer indications of the directions which further research might profitably follow.

Notes

[1] This is a revised version of a paper read at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, New York, NY, December 28-30, 1981.

[2] These are listed in Ferguson 1979 and Gaies 1981b.

[3] Long 1981c asserts that for ungrammaticalities to occur, two or more of the following conditions must be met: the NNS has minimal or no proficiency in the language; the NS believes himself or herself to be of higher social status than the NNS; the NS has considerable prior experience in NS-NNS interaction; and the conversation occurs spontaneously.

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Table 1. Present and nonpresent temporal marking of verbs in NS-NS and NS-NNS interaction

	Present		Nonpresent	
	n	%	n	%
NS-NS	555	61.39	349	38.61
	(317)*	(55.71)	(252)	(44.29)
NS-NNS	416	70.39	175	29.61
	(1268)	(59.84)	(851)	(40.16)

Present study: $\chi^2 = 12.71$, df = 1, $p < .001$)
Long 1981b: ($\chi^2 = 3.33$, df = 1, $p > .05$, NS)

* In this and the following tables, figures in parentheses are from Long 198[illegible]

Table 2. Ratio of topic-continuing to topic-initiating moves in NS-NS and NS-NNS interaction

Move	NS-NS		NS-NNS	
Topic-initiating	50	(50)	50	(50)
Topic-continuing	546	(606)	416	(211)
Ratio	10.92	(12.12)	8.32	(4.22)

Present study: ($t = 1.59$, $df = 98$, $p > .11$, NS)
Long 1981b: ($t = 5.77$, $df = 98$, $p < .0005$)

Table 3. Proportion of topic-initiating moves encoded as questions, statements, imperatives, and fragments in NS-NS and NS-NNS interaction

	Questions		Statements		Imperatives		Fragments	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
NS-NS	24	48	22	44	1	2	3	6
	(31)	(62)	(17)	(34)	(2)	(4)	(0)	(0)
NS-NNS	34	68	12	24	1	3	3	6
	(48)	(96)	(2)	(4)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)

Present study: (Questions x statements, $\chi^2 = 4.67$, df = 1, $p < .05$)
Long 1981b: (Questions x statements, $\chi^2 = 17.54$, df = 1, $p < .0005$)

Table 4. Proportions of topic-initiating moves (out of 50 total topic-initiations) formed by uninverted (intonation), wh, yes/no, and tag questions in NS-NS and NS-NNS interaction

	Uninverted		wh		yes/no		tag	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
NS-NS	3	6	12	24	8	16	1	2
	(5)	(10)	(15)	(30)	(10)	(20)	(1)	(2)
NS-NNS	4	8	14	28	16	32	0	0
	(2)	(4)	(25)	(50)	(20)	(40)	(1)	(2)

Present study: (Wh x yes/no, $\chi^2 = 0.85$, df = 1, $p > .30$, NS)
Long 1981b: (Wh x yes/no, $\chi^2 = 0.01$, df = 1, $p > .90$, NS)